DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 699 HE 016 446

TITLE Enhancing Academic Advising Skills: A Resource Manual for Staff Development.
INSTITUTION Wisconsin Univ., Milwaukee. Counseling and Advising Network.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Advising; *Counseling Techniques; Departments; Educational Policy; Ethics; *Faculty Advisers; Faculty Development; Graduation Requirements; Helping Relationship; Higher Education; *Information Needs; Privacy; Skill Development; *Staff Development; Student College Relationship; Student Evaluation; Student Records
IDENTIFIERS *University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

ABSTRACT

A handbook for improving the skills of academic advisors, and specifically advisors at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee (UWM), is presented. Attention is directed to four main topics: philosophies, goals, policies and procedures of the university; job-specific knowledge of the school/division; ethical concerns; and advising skills and techniques. It is suggested that advisors should be provided with a manual containing specific information about academic requirements and procedures and careers related to the academic area. Ethical concerns, which are addressed in a UWM policies manual, are identified, including policies regarding student records, sexual harassment, and the advisor's anecdotal records. The following advising skills and techniques are briefly discussed: establishing rapport, nonverbal communication, active listening, types of questions that can be used, information giving, and problem solving and decision making. Advisor attitudes that affect advising are also addressed: cross cultural awareness, respect for individuals, and involvement as a person. Lastly, student assessment and the monitoring of progress in academic performance are discussed. A list of reference materials, many of which pertain to UWM, and a bibliography are included. (SW)

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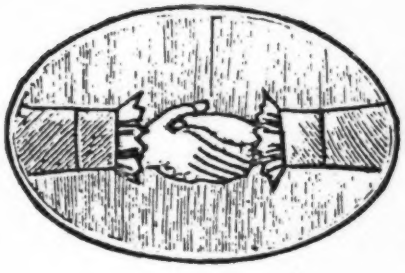
ENHANCING ACADEMIC ADVISING SKILLS:

A RESOURCE MANUAL FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT



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COUNSELING AND ADVISING NETWORK

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE

APRIL 1981

INTRODUCTION

It seems appropriate to write a few words about how this manual came to be written. The Advising/Counseling Network since its origin has had an active interest in promoting the professional development of all persons involved in advising students at UWM. With that end in mind, there have been In-Service programs offered several times a year and other activities to promote student-staff understanding and cooperation.

Some of us within the Network were interested in and concerned about the initiation of new staff members into the mysteries of student services at UWM. Two major factors led us to believe that perhaps the situation warranted attention:

1) The individuals employed in advising/counseling positions have been recruited from a wide variety of educational backgrounds. One individual may have a degree in a liberal arts discipline, another in guidance and counseling and a third in teaching. This in itself is not bad. In fact, it may be a strength. Student services staff are not poured from the same mold. We are as diverse in background and philosophies as the student body itself. What this does indicate, however, is that no assumptions can be made regarding the type of preparation we bring to our tasks.

2) The orientation of a new employee may vary from a planned learning program in one department to trial and error learning in another. The learning process is complicated by the amount of material to be learned and the lack of a manual to guide a new staff member.

Recognizing that a heterogeneous staff is an asset on an urban campus and also that no single training program can prepare one for the great variety of jobs included in the population with which we are concerned, we have attempted to bring together some very basic information and suggested readings for those who share our concern.

This manual is not meant to be an extensive and complete discussion of the field of advising and counseling. Rather, we hope it is a first step in improving the orientation of new staff in departments which have not had a planned training program. In departments which already have a training program, we hope this paper may prove to be a helpful resource.

We welcome your reactions to this manual and will be interested to learn how and with whom you may have utilized this material, the results of such usage and suggestions for improving and supplementing it.

The Training Sub-Committee of the
Advising Counseling Network

Regina Cregor
Phyllis Goodman
Mike Hauer
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Paul Tutwiler

HOW TO USE THE MANUAL

We have divided the contents into four main topics:

I. Philosophies, Goals, Policies and Procedures of the University
II. Job - Specific Knowledge of the School/Division
III. Ethical Concerns
IV. Advising Skills and Techniques

There is a brief statement describing each topic and subtopic and a list of recommended readings. Once again, the bibliography is not a complete listing of all books on these topics, but instead is a compilation of those books and articles deemed helpful by one or more members of the sub-committee.

If you are planning a training program, you may wish to include one or more topics from our list and consult some of the references noted. For others who may have an interest in reading about a specific area, we hope we are able to suggest a current publication.

Two very excellent publications for those preparing training programs are Training Competent Staff edited by Ursula Delworth and Academic Advising, A Resource Document and Academic Advising, A Resource Document 1979 Supplement, both edited by David S. Crockett. We found these books to be invaluable.

In addition to printed material, role playing for practicing communications skills and video tapes for critiquing advising situations may be utilized in a training program. These tapes consisting of simulated academic advising sessions have been prepared by the American College Testing Program and may be borrowed from the Network.

I. PHILOSOPHIES AND GOALS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES OF THE UNIVERSITY

Fundamental to any training program, formal or informal, is an understanding of the philosophy and goals of the University. In addition, familiarity with UWM regulations, campus policies and procedures is vital to the successful fulfillment of advising responsibilities. It would be ideal if we could turn to one publication which would provide us with all the information needed. Unfortunately, this is not the case and probably never will be because much of the material referred to changes frequently and must be up-dated continually.

In lieu of a single publication, we suggest that the pertinent publications be assembled in a notebook or on a reference shelf for easy accessibility and be reviewed frequently for accuracy. The following publications are recommended:

1. UWM Bulletins Graduate and Undergraduate (published annually).
2. The UWM Mission Statement.
3. The Class Schedule (published each semester).
4. The UWM Policies concerning the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Acts of 1974 and addendum (available from the Dean of Students' Office).

4a. Chapter UWS 18, Conduct on University Lands; Chapter UWM 17, Student Disciplinary Procedure (a single publication available from the Dean of Students' Office).

5. UWM Academic Misconduct Case Process (available from the Dean of Students' Office).
6. UWM Non-Academic Misconduct Case Process (available from the Dean of Students' Office).
7. The Impact of Advising/Counseling on Retention at UWM - a paper prepared by the Advising/Counseling Network.
8. The Impact of Academic Counseling and Advising on Student Retention - a videotape prepared by the Advising/Counseling Network.

II. KNOWLEDGE SPECIFIC TO THE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS DIRECTLY REPRESENTED AND TO RELATED CAREER FIELDS

Within the university there are regulations, procedures and curricular requirements which are specific to the academic unit. They may apply to a very large group of students, such as all undergraduates in a particular school or they may affect only the majors of one department or even be limited to a particular program within the major.

Advisors should be furnished with a manual or handbook containing the specific information they need for the area in which they advise. The problem in many cases is that the pertinent requirements and procedures are not clearly and completely stated in a handy and authoritative form. The university publishes many bulletins, pamphlets, etc., which focus upon a particular aspect of the programs and services available. The Department of Admissions Counseling maintains a supply of publications and will provide them upon request. Such material should be assembled for convenient reference.

Without aspiring to be career counselors, academic advisors/counselors should be able to impart up-to-date information on careers related to the academic areas represented. The more informed they are the better, but handy information sources with statistics and the like are quite necessary. Once again, the basic task is to be sure that someone collects such information, keeps it current, and has it organized for immediate retrieval.

III. ETHICAL CONCERNS

The manual entitled "UWM Policies Concerning the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974" consists of eleven chapters and six exhibits. We mention salient points and their location in the manual:

Although a limited number of persons are considered officially responsible for implementing and carrying out policies regarding student records (Exhibit A), advisors should be familiar with certain aspects of these policies such as: the steps to be taken in inspection and review of educational records by eligible students (Chapter V), the handling of educational records (Chapter VI), the limitations on the right to inspect and review educational records (Chapter VII), and the problems of disclosure of data from educational records (Chapter VIII).

They should also know where to find information on waiver of rights (Chapter IX), the amendment of educational records (Chapter X), and the particular method which UWM employs for these various acts (Exhibits B through F).

The aforementioned ethical concerns are dictated by federal law. There are other concerns which, at first glance, may seem too obvious to be mentioned but seem to bear repeating. We believe any group discussion could identify many more.

1. Confidentiality must be maintained to protect privacy and to develop a relationship of trust with students.
2. Criticizing faculty/staff to students only serves to add to their frustrations and undermines confidence in the University. A good policy is: If you can't say something positive or constructive; don't say anything.
3. The problem of sexual harassment, while currently receiving much attention, is not a new problem. A University statement is being developed and should define just what constitutes harassment. In the meantime, advisors can become critical observers of their own advising interactions, watching for sexist language and behaviors.
4. One of the most important, yet often forgotten duties of an advisor, is keeping anecdotal records. The advisee's file should contain records of advising sessions, phone conversations, etc. It is essential, that the advisor's entries be objective and unambiguous. Subjective notations (personal opinions, speculations, etc.) have no place in academic records. Entries carry the date and name or initials of the advisor.

IV. ADVISING SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

Good advising/counseling incorporates counseling theory with communication and listening skills. Counseling styles vary from person to person and from interview to interview. The purpose of an interview, e.g., to discuss failing grades or to discuss career goals, as well as such factors as available time, student receptiveness, etc. may determine the style and techniques employed.

Establishing Rapport

The advisor should strive to establish a personal, genuine and open relationship with advisees. Although the physical setting of the office is important, the professional and sensitive manner of the advisor is even more so. The ability of the advisor to create positive feelings and confidence will provide the basis for the utilization of counseling skills, and encourage the advisee to seek information.

A warm, courteous and empathetic manner can help to reduce the student's anxiety toward the advisor who may be viewed as a threatening authority figure. It may be necessary to explain that the role of an academic advisor is to advise, not demand or punish.

Non-Verbal Communication

An awareness of non-verbal cues can aid in establishing rapport with advisees and will enhance the interviewing skills of the advisor. Because non-verbal cues, such as posture, gestures, eye contact, etc. provide clues to inner thoughts and may conflict with verbal messages, it is important to become sensitive to this form of communication in oneself and in others.

Active Listening

Active listening places responsibility on advisors to try to grasp the facts and feelings in what is heard and through this to help students work out their own problems. It requires a basic attitude which genuinely respects the work of students, considers their rights and trusts them.

To be skillful in active listening requires that we get inside the speaker, grasp the point of view being communicated and convey that we understand this point of view. This needs to be done in an atmosphere of freedom, understanding, acceptance and warmth and implies a non-judgemental attitude that allows for thinking <u>with</u> students rather than <u>for</u> or <u>about</u> them.

Some of the specific skills to be developed include listening for total meaning, responding reflectively and with sensitivity to the feeling component in the message, and being aware of non-verbal communication expressed by hesitations or inflections in speech, facial expressions, body posture, hand and eye movements, breathing, etc. It is important to avoid ridicule or sarcasm and to talk less and hear more.

Active listening skills require checking one's understanding of what is heard, minimizing external distractions, taking notes where facts and data are important, establishing good eye contact, using affirmative head nods, appropriate facial expressions and asking clarifying or continuing questions.

Listening is contagious. When people are listened to sensitively, they tend to listen to themselves with more care and to express more clearly exactly what they are feeling and thinking.

Types of Questions

Several different types of questions can be utilized in the advising interview as techniques for helping students. For example:

Closed questions are best to begin conversations because they make it easy for advisees to enter the conversation and can be used to direct it to specific areas and to gain specific facts.

Open-ended questions can be used to get advisees to elaborate on objectives, goals and problems and to draw them more actively into conversation that will help them discover things on their own.

Clarifying questions invite advisees to expand or clarify ideas previously expressed and help uncover what is really on their minds.

Third-party questions are indirect probes which relate how others feel or react to particular subjects and then lead to questioning the advisee for his/her reaction to the same subject.

Information Giving

The advisor is, primarily, a giver of information. Students rely on advisors for up-to-date, accurate answers to questions about curriculum requirements, academic rules and regulations, appeals procedures, etc. It is the advisor's responsibility to keep informed about all aspects of the University. The advisor must acquaint him/herself with the various sources of information, such as the University publications mentioned earlier. In addition, committee work and peer contact are excellent ways to exchange information and keep abreast of trends and proposed changes.

No one advisor can answer every possible question asked by students, but a good advisor will be able to refer students to appropriate persons who can answer specific questions. The Directory of Counselors and Advisors distributed by the Counseling and Advising Network is a valuable aid when seeking information.

A word of caution about information giving may be in order. It is not sufficient to simply give an answer and consider the matter closed. It is important to be sure the student has understood the information given. This can be achieved through questioning and giving the student the opportunity to speak.

The advisor needs to be aware that in some cases the student with a question has a "hidden agenda." When the advisor is receptive, friendly and interested, the true nature of the student's concern may surface. Therefore, advisors should use information giving as an opportunity to check on the student's progress and to elicit his/her feelings about the educational experience, thus creating an opportunity for self-expression.

Problem Solving - Decision Making

Learning techniques of making decisions has become commonplace both in business management and in counseling. Although the responsibility for making decisions rests ultimately upon the advisee, the advisor's knowledge of

technique can help the advisee to see clear paths through what otherwise appears to be a bewildering maze.

We can suggest as a useful decision-making model the following:

1. Identify the problem
2. Identify values and goals
3. Identify alternatives
4. Examine alternatives
5. Make a tentative decision
6. Take action on the decision
7. Evaluate outcomes

Attitudes of Advisor

Underlying the advising skills and techniques which can be directly taught and learned are certain advisor attitudes which affect advising for the better when they are possessed in good measure. To make an exact list of these attitudes, to give them precise names, is somewhat arbitrary. To hope to teach them, to inculcate them, in a brief training course, is presumptous. Still, consideration of the following three headings should form a part of the training program. They are derived from experience, and the trainer's experience will be the guide to the discussion about them.

1. Cross Cultural Awareness

Advisors encounter students of every race, ethnic background, religion, age and sex as well as physically handicapped students who, until a few years ago, may not have been able to attend UWM. An appreciation of students' uniqueness as individuals as well as sensitivity to students' cultural heritage are important elements in the advising process.

Awareness sessions in cross cultural groups are useful elements of training. In lieu of them, printed, audio or visual presentations can help sharpen sensitivities.

2. Respect for Individuals

Conviction that this individual is important, that this person counts, facilitates a centering of attention on him/her and fosters such common courtesies as keeping appointments.

Such an attitude is usually part of a person's personal value system. Training programs can include value clarification exercises as a basis for discussions of the trainees' value systems.

3. Involvement as a Person

The advisor should represent the institution not as a functionary but as one of its people. This implies personal concern for the advisees: some capacity to laugh or cry with the advisee and to remember to do follow-up after the advising session. On the other hand, it does not mean personal sentimental embroilment in the lives of others.

Advisors can be expected to have sufficient insight into themselves to recognize their potential level of involvement; some ma, need help in deciding how to deal with this level, be it high or low.

Assessment of Student

The Student Placement Report at UWM provides one of the few information bases on new students which are available to advisors. It contains the student's high school percentile rank, high school course work and placement test scores. Advisors need to be familiar with the meaning of high school rankings and eligibility for particular placements as listed on the Student Placement Report. They should also be aware of the range of scores possible on placement tests in order to be alert to weaknesses or strengths students might have in particular areas.

Since the importance of test scores can be over emphasized in estimating the student's potential for implementing his/her education plan, it is important to be aware of and concerned with the variety of non-measurable factors that help account for college success, e.g., study habits, satisfaction with courses, out of class accomplishments, motivation, commitment. These factors can help to modify a student's achievement, up or down, from a level determined by general academic ability.

values What a person wants to be, what he/she wants to accomplish in life, permeates all discussion of choice of occupation and major and how to achieve that goal. "Basic motivation" is another way of stating the underlying themes of a person's life. Is wealth and ease--let us be honest about it--what a persons wants out of life? Is it stability and security? What about altruistic social involvement or adventure or artistic expression?

Such factors may not be mentioned explicitly in an advising session, but the advisor needs to be aware of their reality and power. The advisor should be ready to bring them out in the open if this will clarify the issues for the student (or for the advisor!). This is especially indicated if a student's life goals and vocational goals are not easily compatible: if the student feels forced to strive for life goals by way of avocations rather than vocations. In this case, good advising/counseling will help the student assess the limits of the tension which can be born between life goals and particular vocations.

"What do you want to do?" "What careers or occupations are most suited to your abilities and aspirations?" These are questions that deal with the range of fields or activities which would be realistic choices for the individual. Perhaps the point of which the advisor must be most aware is that careers overlap so that most persons actually have a choice of careers--a choice of which they themselves may not be aware.

Thus the advisor needs to be familiar with the career alternatives that are pertinent to the particular advisee. Prime consideration here has to be given to the recognized careers or occupations which have visible preparations and entry procedures. Sometimes a person is interested in a hybrid career, and in this case, there needs to be careful discussions of appropriate modes of preparation and entry. In any case, the advisor must be ready to explain the relationship between occupations and may find it useful to have at hand graphic illustrations such as the ACT World of Work Map which is appended to this section.

especially

Majors and course alternatives are related to career alternatives. That is to say, that the advisor must know what courses of study furnish appropriate academic preparation for the various careers. Here again the advisor may be able to point out to the student that more than one major may be suitable for the career he/she has in mind. The following ACT Map of College Majors is an example of a useful graphic aid in this matter.

Monitoring Progress

Advisors need to be alert to any academic deficiencies that exist so that the student can be advised of the need to remove them and the procedure for doing so. Where weaknesses are recognizable in areas important to the successful completion of a student's program, constructive suggestions and appropriate references need to be made to help the student overcome these difficulties as early as possible.

Periodic review of students' academic records (with freshmen, as early as eight week grade reports and with other students on a semesterly basis) may help avert the development of problems too serious to correct at a later date. Intrusive advising (in this case, scheduling conferences for students who appear to be having academic difficulties) is an appropriate initial step in this process.

Determining reasons for poor academic performance requires patience on the part of the advisor who may need answers to questions such as the following:

- Is the advisee attending class regularly?
- Is underachievement a problem with this advisee?
- Is remedial help in study skills or tutoring available?
- Would assistance in planning a time schedule be welcome?
- Does the advisee know how to take notes?
- Does he/she use the library
- Does the advisee have solid peer contacts and a feeling of belonging on campus?
- What suggestions can be made?
- Are personal circumstances presenting insurmountable obstacles to this student's success?
- If the problem is financial, is help available on campus?

Responsibilities of an Academic Advisor

While the character of our academic units may be different and academic advising may vary accordingly, there exist some responsibilities that are common to all advisors. Put simply, academic advisors are facilitators, coordinators and information givers. The goal of academic advising is to assist students to take full advantage of the educational opportunities open to them.

The college years can be a period of great personal growth, often characterized by indecision, experimentation and confused emotions. The wise advisors recognize that students need time to evaluate and reflect upon these new experiences and feelings.

To facilitate personal development and the educational process, advisors assist students in looking at alternatives and setting long and short term goals. To be able to do so it is wise for advisors to become acquainted with

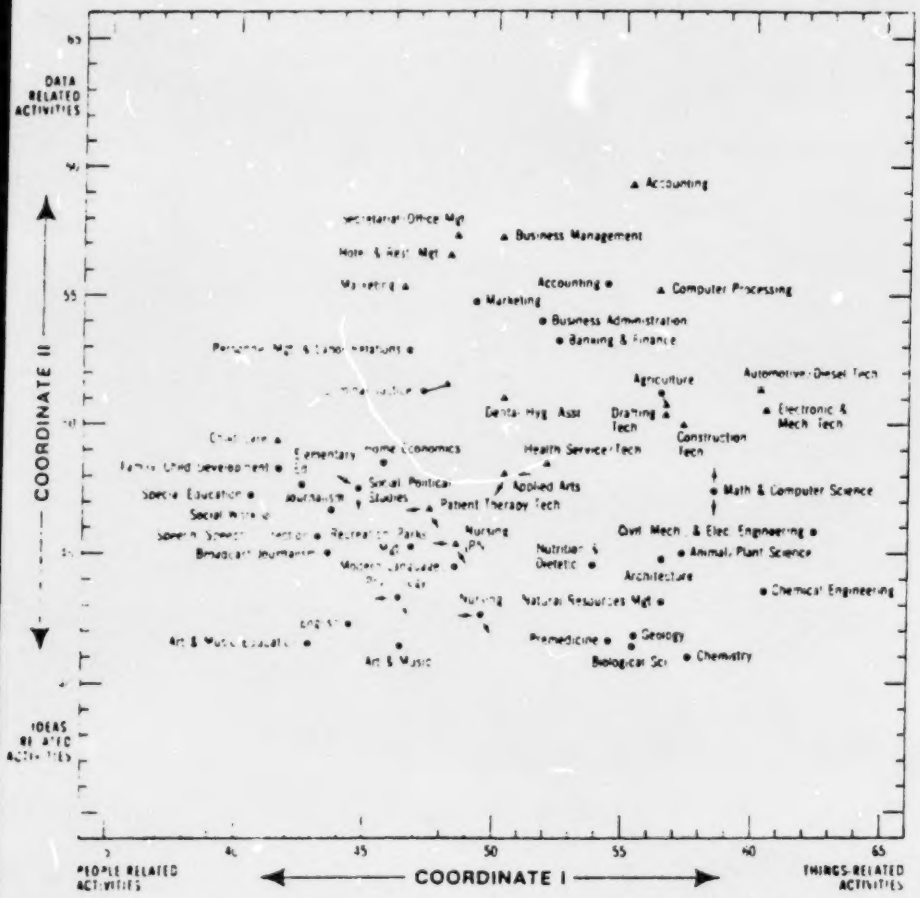
the academic backgrounds of students and also to obtain information about such factors as family influences, financial needs and extracurricular activities.

Another facet of advisors' responsibilities is providing information about educational options, requirements and procedures. Advisors have the responsibility to help students plan programs consistent with interests and abilities. It should be emphasized that advisees should be more involved in the decision making process than advisors. Also, decision making focuses on long term goals, not just immediate needs.

The advisor should monitor advisees' progress toward achieving their educational goals. If progress is not in accordance with their abilities, it is the advisor's duty to help them plan activities for remedy. If needed, the advisor should refer the advisee to other persons or services.

The Map of College Majors and the World-of-Work Map use your interest scores to help you identify college majors and occupations you may want to consider. The interpretive guide in your ACT Assessment results shows you how to use these maps. As you do, be careful to refuse interests with abilities.

MAP OF COLLEGE MAJORS



HOW TO PLOT YOUR SCORES ON THE MAP OF COLLEGE MAJORS

1. Copy your map coordinates I (_____) and II (_____) from the Interest Inventory section on the reverse side.
2. Locate your score for coordinate I on the map and draw a vertical line from that point to the corresponding point at the top edge of the map. Then locate your score on coordinate II and draw a horizontal line from that point to the corresponding point at the right edge of the map.
3. Where the two lines cross [illegible] the location of your interests [illegible] college majors [illegible] indicated by ● and [illegible] majors [illegible] the closer [illegible] your interests are [illegible]

WORLD-OF-WORK MAP

HOW TO USE THE WORLD-OF-WORK MAP

1. Copy your World-of-Work Map Region (_____) from the Interest Inventory section on the reverse side.
2. Use your region number to locate your region on the World-of-Work Map. Look at the job families in your region **and** the adjacent regions. The jobs in these families generally involve activities corresponding to your interest scores. Although your region on the map does not indicate which job you should enter, it should help you identify jobs you may want to **explore**.
3. Turn to the Job Family List in *Your ACT Assessment Results* for a list of jobs in each family. This interpretive guide also suggests several ways you can find out more about jobs.

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